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RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 9543  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 6852  
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0364  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 5360  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003146

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2031

TAGS: PGOV TW

SUBJECT: WEEKEND ANTI-CHEN PROTESTS PEACEFUL, CONTINUE ON  
SMALLER SCALE

REF: A. TAIPEI 03118

1B. TAIPEI 03038  
1C. TAIPEI 03027

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Weekend protests aimed at "deposing" President Chen were peaceful and attracted up to 100,000 people on Saturday, September 9. Turnout did not reach the 300,000 organizers projected. Organizers nevertheless declared the turnout was a "strong statement" of the people's disappointment with President Chen. Attendance on Sunday dropped to around 10,000 under heavy rain. As people returned to work on Monday morning, protesters at the sit-in site on Ketagalan Boulevard dropped further to 2,000 to 3,000 people. With clearing weather by late afternoon numbers were up to 5,000. President Chen, on the other hand, traveled to Tainan county on Saturday to attend a rally organized by his supporters and to Hualian to view an exhibit. He continued to vow he will remain in office, arguing that calls for him to step down without a "justifiable reason" were "against the principles of democracy." End Summary.

Number Estimates

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¶2. (C) The "Depose Chen" movement led by former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairman Shih Ming-te kicked off a peaceful rally and sit-in on Saturday, September 9. Police estimates placed turnout at around 100,000. Though far short of the 300,000 expected to participate, organizers nevertheless characterized the rally as a "success" and insisted publicly that 300,000 had showed up. Soochow University Professor Emile Sheng, a long-time AIT contact who serves as the movement's international spokesperson, acknowledged to AIT on September 11 that "realistically" only around 100,000 people attended the event on Saturday. He cited increases in local metro ridership, which was up 130,000 from normal weekend patterns, as evidence of significant participation. While Sheng admitted some of the increase in ridership was due to rainy weather, a significant proportion appeared to be passenger traffic to the event.

¶3. (C) Turnout on Sunday dropped significantly, with most

public estimates at 10,000. AIT observers estimate the turnout was between 5,000 to 10,000. Heavy rains throughout the day presumably kept many would-be participants at home. The start of the workweek on Monday dwindled numbers farther down to 2,000-3,000, according to some local media estimates.

Two of six lanes on Ketagalan Boulevard, where the sit-in continues, were open to traffic on Monday morning. By late afternoon, clearing weather helped to boost numbers up to 5,000 and the whole street was closed off to traffic.

#### Crowd Composition

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¶4. (C) The crowd on Saturday spanned a wide range of age groups and, unlike the "trial" sit-ins the previous weekend (Ref B), included many families with children. Participants came from various areas of the wider Taipei metropolitan area, rather than primarily from the immediate surrounding neighborhoods. Despite some reports that several chartered buses from central and southern Taiwan were going to bring people to the event, Professor Sheng said the demonstration was "spontaneous" and almost everyone came via public transportation.

¶5. (C) Politically, however, the crowd appeared to consist mainly of opposition pan-Blue supporters and was, thus, not representative of Taiwan's political spectrum. Opposition People First Party Chairman James Soong and Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's cameo appearances at the rally gave substance to their previous endorsements of the movement. Unlike many political rallies in Taiwan where local Taiwanese dialect is often the lingua franca, all official activities on Saturday were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Taiwanese

TAIPEI 00003146 002 OF 002

was only occasionally heard, suggesting a significant number of those participating were ethnic mainlanders or urbanized elites who tend to be supporters of the opposition pan-Blue parties. At one point during the rally participants became clearly agitated and upset when one of the rally speakers accidentally referred to the audience as "people of the Republic of Taiwan," a term used primarily by extreme pro-independence and ruling party supporters. In a meeting with DIR late Monday, Legislative Speaker (KMT) Wang Jin-pyng claimed that 99 percent were pan-Blue. He said that he did not join the rally because he needed to maintain strict neutrality as LY speaker.

#### Chen Strikes Back

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¶6. (C) President Chen, on the other hand, traveled to his home county of Tainan on Saturday to attend a rally organized by his supporters. He vowed to remain in office, saying calls for him to step down without a "justifiable reason" were "against the principles of democracy." Chen expressed his support for anti-corruption efforts, blasting the opposition KMT as "Taiwan's biggest corrupt conglomerate." He reiterated his pledge to continue his work on Taiwan's bid to enter the UN under the name "Taiwan," promote a new constitution, and support a referendum on assets stolen by the KMT during its rule. Chen traveled to Hualian on the east coast on Sunday to view an exhibition that was reportedly put together with short notice.

#### Next Steps

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¶7. (C) Organizers of the "Depose Chen" movement plan to continue their sit-in on Ketagalan Boulevard for the foreseeable future. Emile Sheng told AIT they have abandoned their original plan to have 2,300 seats on the boulevard because the complicated mechanism of musical chairs "was not working out." Turnout, predicted Sheng, should remain at around a few thousand people per day up until Friday, when a

red glow-stick vigil outside the Presidential Office should draw more people. On Saturday the campaign will have to move out of Ketagalan Boulevard to make room for a pro-Chen rally organized by a DPP legislator. Sheng said "Depose Chen" organizers have yet to determine their venue or activities for that day. LY Speaker Wang told the DIR that there may be plans to do "random" walks around the Presidential Office's residence before the venue moves to the train station and the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial. President Chen is certain not to step down despite the protests, Wang asserted. Wang also dismissed as empty talk public suggestions by Shih that he will call for a popular "strike" against the government in October if Chen has not stepped down.

Comment

18. (C) With a significant, though lower than expected, turnout, organizers of the "Depose Chen" movement showed on Saturday they could marshal a respectable number of people who want to depose Chen. Despite being led by some former members of the pan-Green camp, however, this movement continues to be heavily pan-Blue in composition. The strong presence of opposition parties compromises the movement's impact by giving the impression of just one more Blue vs. Green political tiff. Without the added pressure from pan-Green heavyweights like Lee Teng-hui or the collapse of support from DPP legislators and the rank-and-file, President Chen appears likely to ride out this political storm.

YOUNG